

Kick-Off, Half-Time, and Over-Time

By Jadé McLeod

Flexible Scheduling Scores Points

As in schools around the country, students at Furman Middle School in Sumter, South Carolina, are diverse and require differentiated instruction and other creative strategies to ensure they are all learning and growing.

When the faculty members expressed concern about the lack of time in each day to provide the interventions, remediation, and enrichment the students needed to be prepared for state testing, then-Principal Sherril Ray suggested a creative schedule as one strategy to meet our students' needs.

Before and After

Our schedule begins with a morning kick-off between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. each day. Many of our students arrive at school early and have quite a wait before school begins. What better time to provide some academic assistance?

When we began to implement this element of the schedule, teachers were already rotating morning duty posts to monitor students in the gym, cafeteria, and schoolyard, so we simply adjusted the supervisory assignments.

First, we limited the number of students allowed in the gym in the morning to a maximum of 50. That reduced the

number of teachers necessary to supervise that area. We were then able to move these other teachers to different locations in the building. We provide

- A homework center with a certified teacher on duty to help students with homework.
- Two computer labs that provide opportunities for students to practice basic skills under teacher supervision.
- The media center where students can work on research projects, take Accelerated Reader tests, check out books, and read. The media specialist and assistant are on duty to help students during this time.

An after-school program—funded by grants—serves students who are struggling and need additional assistance with homework and students who need academic enrichment. This program continues to evolve as student needs and funding change.

In the Middle

When our faculty members analyzed data related to student achievement, we learned that our students were really struggling in reading, which directly affected their success in the other academic areas. We altered our lunch schedule and shaved a few minutes off each class period to create "half time": a 45-minute

block for self-selected reading (see Figure 1).

During this half-time, teachers help students who need individual or small group instruction in any of the core areas while the rest of the students read.

According to sixth grade math teacher Patricia Christmas, “I love self-selected reading time. This allows the children to see me in a role other than math teacher. However, when a student or small group of students needs additional math assistance, I can ask my exploratory teacher to come in and oversee the self-selected reading while I work with the students on math concepts. The flexibility is great!”

Teams' Choice

In addition to the schoolwide schedule changes, each team has the authority to be as creative and flexible as necessary during “team time”—any time the students are with their core area teachers. The members of each team (four core teachers) meet every week to discuss the schedule for the next week, which is determined by the needs of the students. Because each team is unique, what works for one team may not work for another.

Elizabeth Boyd, an eighth grade language arts teacher on the inclusion team, explains how her team uses its freedom to create a flexible schedule to enhance the instruction and meet the needs of the students on their team:

“Mrs. Ash (the social studies teacher) and Ms. Burton (the math teacher) both teach math during half-time. Mrs. Laverdiere (the science teacher) and I use self-selected reading and conferencing with the other two classes. When it is time for Academy (when band and chorus students go to those classes), we switch groups and teach math and read with the opposite groups. That way, all students have math and reading twice a day, every day.” Figure 2 outlines the Academy block activities.

Teacher buy-in to the teaming concept is vital to student achievement. Because each team of teachers works together for a common goal, they are willing to be flexible to meet the needs of their students. Angela Tomlin-Hart, a veteran sixth grade language arts teacher, shares her thoughts about how teaming improves student achievement at Furman Middle School:

“I believe students’ overall success and achievement are improved because as a team we are able to co-teach by sharing our lessons in the different content areas, thus allowing the students to receive different perspectives on the materials. For example, although I teach language arts I may reinforce an activity using fractions to further student comprehension.”

At Furman Middle School, Principal Dale Wilson has continued to support the creative, flexible scheduling determined by student needs. Teachers continue their quest to ensure each and every student reaches his or her potential. As student needs change at Furman Middle School, so may the school and classroom schedules. The faculty and staff will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure all students have the opportunity to achieve. ■

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Figure 1

Furman Middle School Bell Schedule

All Grades

8:00 – 8:30 Homeroom/Advisement

8:33 – 9:19 1st Period

9:22 – 10:08 2nd Period

6th

7th

8th

10:11 – 10:57 Lunch 3rd Period 3rd Period

11:00 – 11:46 Half-time Lunch 4th Period

11:49 – 12:35 3rd Period Half-time Lunch

12:38 – 1:24 4th Period 4th Period Half-time

All Grades

1:27 – 2:13 5th Period

2:16 – 3:04 6th Period

3:09 – 3:25 Homeroom/Daily Wrap-Up & Channel One

Figure 2

Academy Time (45-Minute Block)

Math Teacher Provides:

- Remediation/Intervention for students scoring below basic in the area of math
- Enrichment

Science and Social Studies Teachers Provide:

- Junior Great Books Program for students reading at grade level or above

Language Arts Teacher Provides:

- Remediation through the use of small group reading instruction for students scoring below basic in the area of reading
- Remediation through the use of small group writing instruction for students scoring below basic in the area of writing
- Literature circles for students reading/writing at grade level or above

Figure 3

A Typical 7th Grade Schedule

1st Period Math

2nd Period Social Studies

3rd Period Exploratory (P.E.)

Lunch

Half-Time

4th Period Academy

5th Period Language Arts

6th Period Science